

Overview of Linking Girls to the Land

What is “Linking Girls to the Land?”

Linking Girls to the Land is an interagency partnership initiative between the Girl Scouts of the USA’s (GSUSA) Elliott Wildlife Values Project and federal natural resource agencies. The initiative works toward the vision that every girl will have an opportunity to participate in conservation and outdoor programs. The purpose of the interagency effort is to encourage partnerships between Girl Scouts and federal agency representatives on national and local levels in order to offer more joint conservation and outdoor programs to 3.7 million girl and adult members nationwide. Linking Girls to the Land provides environmental education programs, outdoor recreation skills, volunteer service, and career awareness.

The Linking Girls to the Land program is built on the existing infrastructure of the Girl Scouts. It recognizes the handbooks and Earned Age-Level Awards that already include extensive outdoor programs and conservation education, the longstanding emphasis on volunteer service, and Girl Scout troops serving many communities near and distant from public lands. This interagency effort is unique in the extent to which natural resource agencies and the Girl Scouts have accomplished the design, development, communication, implementation, and evaluation together since 1995.

Linking Girls to the Land began in 1995 with five federal natural resource agencies:

- Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Department of Interior (BLM)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of Interior (USFWS)
- U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USFS)
- National Park Service, U.S. Department of Interior (NPS)
- Natural Resource Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture (NRCS)

Since its inception the initiative has expanded to include the:

- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
- United States Geological Survey, U.S. Department of Interior (USGS)
- National Parks Conservation Association (NPCS) – Americans for National Parks Campaign, a non-governmental conservation organization (ANP)

Linking Girls to the Land is designed to encourage Girl Scouts to work with federal and state natural resource agencies in an effort to do conservation work and career exploration. However, in addition to a federal or state natural resource agency partner, it is likely that many Girl Scout troops and councils will also collaborate with county, city, and other local natural resource agencies to offer conservation and outdoor programs to girls. Additional collaborators may include non-profit and volunteer groups that offer environmental education and outdoor programs, which troops and councils can work with.

How Girl Scouts and Federal Agencies Can Work Together

Girl Scout councils are informed that limited funding and staffing means that most agencies are unable to work directly with individual Girl Scouts and troops. Multi-troop or council-wide activities are encouraged in order to best utilize each agency professional's time and maximize the number of

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girls who experience the outdoor activities. Councils interested in doing this would designate a contact person to meet with agency professionals and then distribute the information to volunteers, troop leaders, and girls. This council contact would work with the local or regional agency contact to identify and offer meaningful opportunities that can be accomplished with agency staff and resources, or perhaps other volunteer groups.

What Girl Scouts Can Do For Natural Resource Agencies

Girls are very interested in field ecology, ecosystem monitoring, biological research, and local conservation issues. Volunteer (www.volunteer.gov) projects could include hands-on service projects on federal or state land to re-vegetate damaged meadows or hillsides, remove exotic plants, monitor stream quality, restore historic buildings, and more. More outdoor recreation (www.recreation.gov) opportunities can be offered to Girl Scouts through organizational camps, group campsites, recreation permits, and Leave No Trace training. This will help girls develop outdoor skills such as developed camping, backpacking, horseback riding, skiing, hiking, fishing, and other activities. Career awareness could include meeting professionals, gaining experience in hands-on field procedures and scientific research, and first-time work experiences through internships.

Some suggested projects and activities for girls include:

- Disseminating information about the agency's natural areas, education programs, and hiking/camping facilities through a Girl Scout newsletter and the council communications network. However, a council cannot endorse, lobby for, or raise funds for other organizations.
- Co-sponsoring service projects with the agency so that interested girls can participate. They can build picnic tables and storage sheds, and design, create, and maintain hiking trails, plus so much more.
- Highlighting the work of the agency in the community by asking representatives to speak at important Girl Scout ceremonies, participate in events, or provide educational materials. This type of community outreach can generate good public relations for both the agency and the Girl Scouts.
- Gathering Girl Scouts to assist in conservation projects on the agency's land, collecting accurate data on water quality in streams or counting the number of amphibian species in certain areas. Such data can help monitor ecosystems and provide alerts to potential environmental impacts occurring locally.

How can I contact a local Girl Scout council? Look at the "Map of Girl Scout Councils" (Appendix 1) to locate a council near you. Find the name and telephone number of the local Girl Scout council by looking under "Girl Scouts" in the telephone directory. You may also use the "Council Finder" on the Girl Scouts Web page www.girlscouts.org/councilfinder/.

What Natural Resource Agencies Can Do For Girl Scouts

The public benefits through service projects completed by the Girl Scouts on federal lands and environmental education efforts within communities surrounding these lands. Through educational programs, girls and adults increase their knowledge of public lands and natural resource principles. Through volunteer (www.volunteer.gov) service projects, they learn how they can participate in the conservation of public lands, and will be the future advocates for public lands. Through outdoor recreation (www.recreation.gov) activities, girls and adults enjoy the outdoors, learn skills based on teamwork and individual competence, and learn how they can use the land responsibly. They are the future users, likely to be more representative socio-economically and demographically of the American public. Through contact with professionals and career awareness programs, the agencies will recruit some of the girls and adults to become future agency professionals. All of these

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experiences will build from awareness to knowledge, from interest and skills to participation, and ultimately to conservation as a value and habit.

Some ways agencies can collaborate with Girl Scouts include:

- Sharing information with a Girl Scout council representative about agency programs. Girl Scouts need to know who to contact to arrange special programs, field trips, or hiking/camping experiences.
- Involving girls in hands-on scientific research and conservation projects such as counting birds and restoring wetlands.
- Serving as short-term consultants to groups of girls working on badges or patches in subject areas such as wildlife, ecology, plant life, eco-action, outdoor survival, camping, and hiking.
- Serving as consultants to girls working on Girl Scout Bronze, Silver, and Gold awards.
- Inviting girls to participate in hands-on service projects such as replanting prairies, putting up bird and bat boxes, or combating soil erosion on hiking trails.
- Serving as property consultants for Girl Scout councils that own land. Agencies can offer technical assistance so councils can set up long-range management plans.
- Guiding girls in inventorying ecological communities or setting up wildlife education centers for their Lou Henry Hoover Memorial Sanctuary or Herford N. Elliott Wildlife Memorial Bird Sanctuary projects on Girl Scout property.

How can I contact the local Federal agency office? Look first at the “Federal Natural Resource Agency Partners” section of this Resource Guide for more information about contacts and programs for each agency. Girl Scouts and other partners can also contact federal agencies by looking up the name of the agency in the “blue” or government pages of a local telephone directory to find the location of the nearest national wildlife refuge, national park, or national forest. Sometimes these are listed by local name, and sometimes under the U.S. Department of Agriculture or U.S. Department of Interior. Listings are also available for the county offices of the NRCS and for the BLM state and field offices (which are found mainly in the western part of the U.S.).

Interagency Program Management

Strategic Plan. The Linking Girls to the Land Strategic Plan was developed at an interagency strategic planning workshop in August 1998 with 25 participants from Girl Scouts of the USA, local Girl Scout councils, field professionals, and agency leaders. Goals developed for 1999-2002 included integrating Linking Girls to the Land into current Girl Scout program elements and training, developing Earned Age-Level Awards, offering national programs to teens, evaluating programs, gaining funding from agencies and foundations, gaining commitment and participation at the local level and from agency leaders, and enhancing communications within agencies and Girl Scouts.

Regional Workshops. The first Linking Girls to the Land activity was an interagency workshop with 42 Girl Scout professionals, held at Camp Joe Sherman in southern California. From 1997 to 2003, the agencies have sponsored Regional Interagency Linking Girls to the Land Workshops in Florida, Arizona-New Mexico, southern and northern California, Maryland-Virginia, Georgia-Carolinas, Kentucky, New England, Louisiana-Texas-Arkansas, and West Virginia-Ohio. These one to two day workshops have introduced Girl Scout professionals and volunteers to local agency professionals for the purpose of learning how to build partnerships, strategically building projects, "networking," and developing specific local events. More workshops are planned.

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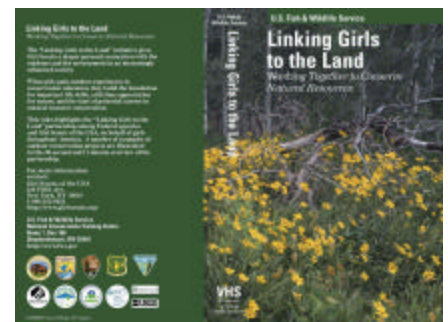
Most recently with a \$5000 grant awarded from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), an expanded Linking Girls to the Land Regional Workshop was held September 19-21, 2003 at the Brier Inn and White Sulphur Springs National Fish Hatchery in Lewisburg, WV. Eighteen adult and Senior Girl Scouts learned effective techniques for designing sustainable wildlife and environmental action projects and activities. Agency and GSUSA professionals led group discussions about Linking Girls to the Land and how to get involved. Through an afternoon field trip to the White Sulphur Springs National Fish Hatchery, participants learned the importance of USFWS property and programs. Girl Scouts learned what opportunities exist with agency partners such as the USFWS. It gave them time to think about how they might be able to work with an agency in their own community. It provided an excellent example of the Linking Girls to the Land goal for girls to develop conservation projects that would benefit both an agency partner and the Girl Scouts. The success of the Linking Girls to the Land Workshop is already apparent. Given less than a month to plan, three Girl Scout councils who attended the workshop submitted Linking Girls to the Land Grant applications for projects to be implemented in the year 2004. Other councils in attendance confirmed that they will be submitting grant applications for the 2005 grant cycle.

In addition, Linking Girls to the Land programs and the Elliott Wildlife Values Project were highlighted in seven Regional Program Conferences in 2001, "We Can Make It Happen: Girl Scouting for Every Girl, Everywhere." Agency professionals and Linking Girls to the Land program managers offered 90-minute workshops that outlined mechanisms for recruiting and retaining girls from under-served communities, identified partnership opportunities between councils and agencies, and offered planning steps for an environmental action activity for under-served girls using existing Girl Scout and agency resources. Almost 300 Girl Scout adult volunteers and council staff learned how to enhance conservation and outdoor programs, and took ideas back to their councils to share.

Coordination Meetings. Agency professionals meet three or four times annually to plan, develop, implement, and evaluate programs. These meetings are coordinated by Jodi Stewart, Manager for the Linking Girls to the Land program at Girl Scouts of the USA, and attended by youth program leaders or designated Girl Scout contacts from the participating agencies. Sometimes they follow other coordination meetings; for example, an interagency meeting was held October 29, 2001 in Shepherdstown, WV at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Training Center, preceding the national meeting of interagency Leave No Trace coordinators.

National Girl Scout Council Session/Convention. The national convention is held every three years, with more than 13,000 adult volunteers, staff, and older girls representing their councils. The agencies worked together for the October 2002 convention in Long Beach, CA to develop and staff an exhibit for Linking Girls to the Land, featuring the Leave No Trace program and the new Linking Girls to the Land video developed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Linking Girls to the Land Video. Through an in-kind collaboration with the U.S. Department of Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service and other federal natural resource agencies, an 11-minute promotional video was produced. The video is designed to increase the awareness of, and motivate participation of Girl Scout councils and federal natural resource agency personnel in the Linking Girls to the Land initiative. This video demonstrates some of the benefits and forms that partnerships between Girl Scout councils and federal natural resource agencies can take. It also illustrates the importance of multi-agency



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partnerships to provide needed conservation and environmental education opportunities for participants from more diverse audiences and underrepresented areas to insure Girl Scouting for Every Girl, Everywhere. The video is in English and is close-captioned. Copies were distributed to each Girl Scout council and natural resource partner contact. Additional copies of the video can be obtained by contacting Marie Spotswood at 301-770-9131 or writing to Video Transfer, 5800 Arundel Avenue, Rockville, MD 20852.

Linking Girls to the Land Web site. A Web site is being developed, with the expectation that the pages will highlight methods for partnering with Federal Natural Resource agencies and Girl Scouts and will be of use to Girl Scouts and Federal Natural Resource Agency representatives alike. Pertinent contact information, examples of partnering projects, GSUSA program links, and summaries of each Linking Girls to the Land partner agency and organization will be provided. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has started a Linking Girls to the Land Web site at www.epa.gov/linkinggirls. This information is currently being updated. The Girl Scouts of the USA Web page also offers program ideas and contacts at www.girlscouts.org.

Linking Girls to the Land Programs and Opportunities



The following programs and opportunities are described in this Resource Guide:

- Linking Girls to the Land Council Grants
- Linking Girls to the Land Projects
- Leave No Trace Program
- Leave No Trace Master Educator Scholarships
- National Park Guide Opportunity
- Water Drop Patch, EPA
- Studio 2B_{sm} destinations (formerly Wider Opportunities)
 - Natural Science in the Tetons
 - NOAA Aquarius Project
- Examples of National Conservation Events
 - National Trails Day
 - National Public Lands Day
 - National Water Monitoring Day

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